

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A communications network, comprising:
a thin media client;
5 a source of digital media content;
a data processing device operable to receive digital media content from the source for
digital media content and to perform a pre-processing function on at least two instances of digital
media content to produce a combined digital data stream that is transmitted to the thin media client;
and
10 wherein the thin media client is operable to render the combined digital data stream
received from the data processing device.
2. The communications network of claim 1, further comprising a hub device and
wherein each of the thin media client, the source of digital media content, and the data processing
15 device are coupled to the hub.
3. The communications network of claim 1, wherein the source of digital media content
comprises the Internet.
- 20 4. The communications network of claim 3, wherein the source of digital media content
comprises digital media content stored in storage associated with the data processing device.
5. The communications network of claim 1, wherein the pre-processing function
performed by the data processing devices comprises the mixing of the at least two instances of digital
25 video content into a picture-in-picture format.

6. The communications network of claim 1, wherein the pre-processing function performed by the data processing devices comprises the mixing of the at least two instances of digital video content into a shared picture format.

5 7. The communications network of claim 6, wherein the pre-processing function performed by the data processing devices comprises the overly of an audio stream over a digital video stream.

8. A method for providing media content to a user associated with a thin media client, comprising the steps of:

receiving from the user a request for media content, the media content requested by the user comprising at least two instances of media content;

5 retrieving the at least two instances of media content;

pre-processing the at least two instances of media content to create a combined data stream of digital media;

transmitting the combined data stream to the thin media client; and

10 rendering the combined data stream at the thin media client to provide the media content of the data stream to the user.

9. The method for providing media content to a user associated with a thin media client of claim 8, wherein the at least two instances of media content comprise at least two instances of digital video.

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10. The method for providing media content to a user associated with a thin media client of claim 9, wherein the step of pre-processing comprises the step of combining the at least two instances of digital video into a combined data stream in picture-in-picture format.

20 11. The method for providing media content to a user associated with a thin media client of claim 8, wherein the at least two instances of media content comprise a digital video data stream having an audio component and an audio-only data stream.

25 12. The method for providing media content to a user associated with a thin media client of claim 11, wherein the step of pre-processing comprises the steps of:

attenuating the audio component from the digital video data stream; and

combining the resulting digital video data stream with the audio-only data stream.

13. The method for providing media content to a user associated with a thin media client of claim 8, wherein the step of retrieving the at least two instances of media content comprises the step of retrieving at least one instance of media content from the Internet.

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14. The method for providing media content to a user associated with a thin media client of claim 8, wherein the step of retrieving the at least two instances of media content comprises the step of retrieving at least one instance of media content from a media storage device.

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15. The method for providing media content to a user associated with a thin media client of claim 8, wherein the step of retrieving the at least two instances of media content comprises the step of retrieving at least one instance of media content from a home appliance.

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16. The method for providing media content to a user associated with a thin media client of claim 8, wherein the step of retrieving the at least two instances of media content comprises the step of retrieving at least one instance of media content from a video camera.

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17. The method for providing media content to a user associated with a thin media client of claim 10, wherein the source of at least one instance of the two instances of digital video is a video camera.

18. A communications network, comprising:
at least one source of digital data;
at least one thin media client, each of the thin media clients associated with a display
or playback device;
5 a data processing device operable to receive and pre-process multiple instances of
digital data following a request from a user associated with one of the thin media clients to produce
a combined data stream that is provided to the thin media client for rendering at the thin media
client; and
a hub device coupled to each of the sources of digital content, the thin media clients;
10 and the data processing device, wherein the hub device is operable to route communications between
the sources of digital data, the thin media clients, and the data processing device.

19. The communications network of claim 18, wherein the at least one source of digital
data is the Internet.

20. The communications network of claim 18, wherein the at least one source of digital
data is a household appliance.

21. The communications network of claim 18, wherein the at least one source of digital
data is a video camera.

22. The communications network of claim 18, wherein the combined data stream
comprises multiple instances of digital video that has been combined in a picture-in-picture format.

23. The communications network of claim 20, wherein the combined data stream
comprises a digital video stream combined with an image or audio tone representing a signal from
a household appliance.

24. The communications network of claim 20, wherein the combined data stream represents a digital video stream combined with an audio stream.

5 25. The communications network of claim 18, wherein the combined data stream represents two unique audio streams.